

Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project

**TRANSFORMATION OF BILINGUAL TEACHER TRAINING:
LEARNING HOW TO TEACH IN THE FIRST LANGUAGE**

IEQ undertaken by:

American Institutes for Research

**in collaboration with
The Academy for Educational Development
Education Development Center, Inc.
Juárez and Associates, Inc.
The University of Pittsburgh**

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March 2001

Contract #HNE-I-00-97-00029-00

Table of Contents

BACKGROUND TO GHANA'S SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY.....	1
IMPLICATIONS OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION.....	2
RESEARCH EVIDENCE OF THE STATE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN THE SCHOOL	3
OBSERVED TEACHER PREPARATIONS.....	4
AN EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL TREND.....	5
TRANSFORMATION OF BILINGUAL TEACHER TRAINING: THE WOSSEC EFFORT	5
TRANSLATION WORKSHOP FOR TUTORS.....	6
TRAINING IN PEDAGOGY	6
FOLLOW-UP VISIT FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY.....	7
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WOSSEC EFFORT.....	7
CONCLUSION	8
REFERENCES.....	9

BACKGROUND TO GHANA'S SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY

The need for education in the mother tongue in Ghana has long been recognised and strongly recommended by both colonial and nationalist governments. In the 1920's for instance, governor Guggisberg's administration gave considerable attention to the study of indigenous African languages and even advocated the use of the local language as the sole medium of instruction in the primary schools (Abosi and Brookman-Amissah, 1992). One of Guggisberg's sixteen principles of education even stipulated, "whilst an English Education must be given it must be based solidly on the vernacular" (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975) implying that for education to be effective and beneficial it must be transmitted through an appropriate medium.

To reinforce the colonial governments' inclination to promote the use of the mother-tongue for instruction in schools, the Phelps Stokes Commission Report of 1922 and 1924 and the Advisory Committee on Education in the colonies highlighted the need for the use of indigenous mother-tongues as media of instruction in schools. It therefore came as no surprise when in 1971 the Ministry of Education acting on the recommendation of the Education Review Committee (the Kwapong Committee) declared formally:

It is now Government policy that the main Ghanaian Languages at present provided for in the curricula of primary and middle schools should be used as the medium of instruction in the first three years of the primary course... In any upper primary or higher classes where English is the teaching medium, the appropriate Ghanaian Languages(s) will be properly taught as a school subject (Ministry of Information, 1971 cited in McWilliam and K- Poh 1975:119).

This is the policy that is supposed to be operational in Ghana now. The success or otherwise of its implementation, however, depends very much on the type of preparation prospective teachers undergo in the training colleges. This paper therefore takes a look at:

- the implication of the language policy for teacher education in Ghana,
- research evidence on the state of policy implementation in the schools,
- observed teacher preparation in the training colleges,
- transformation of bilingual teacher training -the WOSEC effort,
- conclusion.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

The language policy as it stands now has several implications for teacher preparation. First, it is clear from the policy that Ghanaian language is to be taught as a subject right from primary class one (i.e. first Grade). This means that all teacher training colleges in Ghana are to expose their students (i.e. the teacher trainees or prospective teachers) to the teaching and learning of the content of the prevalent Ghanaian language of their area. To ease teacher posting the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Ministry of Education in Ghana has directed all teacher training colleges to take their students through the content of at least two Ghanaian languages.

Secondly, teacher trainees are to learn the use of the Ghanaian languages as media of instruction (MOI) for all subjects in the lower primary except English language. In effect, every student at the teacher training college should be able to teach Ghanaian language both as a subject and as MOI in schools (i.e. as MOI for the first three years).

These first two implications lead to another: That there will be available in the training colleges tutors who possess specialised skills to provide the requisite training in the content of the selected Ghanaian languages as well as the methodology for teaching Ghanaian language and using it as MOI.

Also, materials for teaching and learning in the local languages must be available for use in the training colleges. Apart from this the curricula of the colleges must incorporate methods for developing teaching and learning materials in the local languages and for using them as MOI. In this way teachers who graduate from the colleges can prepare basic materials on their own and use them to teach their pupils.

Another implication is that teacher trainees will be exposed to the methodology of teaching English as a subject in the first three years of primary school and using it as MOI from primary class four onwards.

All these imply that students at the teacher training colleges will be made to study the content and structure of the Ghanaian language and what this means for children's language acquisition. They must also be exposed to the rationale for the language policy using empirical evidence.

The directive that each teacher training college should offer first language methodology and content in at least two of the 11 prescribed Ghanaian languages has been in existence since the introduction of the 1987 Educational reforms, which initially sought to place emphasis on the study of indigenous languages in the Senior Secondary Schools.

Long before 1987, the National Redemption Council (NRC) government had, among others, established the School of Ghana Languages (SOL) at Ajumako where Post Secondary Trained Teachers were admitted to study for a diploma in two Ghanaian Languages. A student at SGL studied his/her own first language (LI) and also studied a second Ghanaian language. The arrangement was that people from different parts of the country selected their second languages from other parts of the country. This was a beginning of teacher preparation for bilingual education of teachers in the Training College, the students from which would later implement the language policy confidently in the primary schools. This effort was supplemented by University of Cape Coast degree holders in Ghanaian languages.

Later in 1992, the SGL was combined with six other diploma awarding teacher-training institutions into the present University College of Education, at Winneba (UCEW). What the SGL was offering is now offered at the Ghanaian Languages Education Department at UCEW. The difference however, is that instead of two Ghanaian languages as was offered at SGL, students at the department of Ghanaian languages education at UCEW offer one Ghanaian language.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE OF THE STATE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN THE SCHOOL

The foregoing background to the policy for teacher preparation for the teaching of Ghanaian languages should have indicated positive performance on the field. There is evidence, however, to the contrary.

Interim findings from the IEQ2 research in the mid 1999 and early 2000 in six primary schools in Ghana suggested that very few of the teachers on the field have been adequately trained to teach, let alone use a Ghanaian language competently as a medium of instruction. Not many of the teachers interviewed and observed claimed to have received much initial training or in-service support in methodology for using Ghanaian language as MOI or teaching it as a subject. In fact, observed performance was very poor in most classes.

Findings from the six sites clearly illustrate this fact. Teachers at AP ALA, for instance, said they would need training to be able to teach the Ghanaian language and teach it as MOI if they were to help implement the policy successfully.

At AWOCHA the headteacher stated, "for proper implementation teachers must be given in- service training." All teachers at this school, except the head teacher, are untrained. The P1 teacher at KAPA urged the government to train more Ghanaian language teachers. The P2 teacher, however, claimed to have studied methods of using Ghanaian Language (Twi) and learned how to teach it as a subject specifically to primary schools. This did not however reflect in his lessons observed by the research

team. The P3 teacher said she received training in Twi as a subject while at College for 12 terms and had received in-service training on Ghanaian Language Teaching in Primary Schools. The P4 teacher had not had any training in Ghanaian language teaching.

In this school all teachers-including those who lay claim to knowledge and skills in the use of the Ghanaian language as medium of instruction and as a subject-taught Ghanaian Language lessons with a mixture of English and Twi. They taught all other subjects in English, succumbing to the school's English-only policy.

Only one among the four teachers at NOTO had learned the local Language at college. All four teachers at MEDOFO except one had studied the local language at college but had not studied the methodology of using Ghanaian Language as a medium of instruction.

The research indicates that few teachers have adequate pre-service preparation in the teaching of Ghanaian language. In service support for the teachers is also non-existent. Some teachers have been posted to places where they have inadequate proficiency in the predominant Ghanaian language.

We observed low performance of teachers in teaching Ghanaian language. This coupled with seeming lack of adequate pre-service preparation of teachers prompted the IEQ team to take a further step. The research team conducted preliminary investigations in four training colleges in the districts of the research sites.

OBSERVED TEACHER PREPARATIONS

Findings from these colleges revealed that attitudes of the principals, vice-principals, tutors and students towards the policy are generally positive in three of the colleges. In the fourth college however, the attitudes are negative. From the responses of the teacher trainees it appears that teachers in this college who implement the policy only do so out of obligation and not from a genuine conviction that the policy is beneficial.

The findings also reveal that the local languages are indeed being taught in all the four colleges. Two Ghanaian languages are offered in all the four colleges visited. While the colleges have tutors who hold degrees in the local languages, most of them did not appear to have imparted to their students the rationale for the use of the Ghanaian language as MOI. The students therefore remained unconvinced that mother-tongue education had any pedagogical benefits.

AN EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL TREND

Particular mention must however be made of the efforts of one of the four colleges visited. This college, WOSEC, was found to have recognised the importance of adequate teacher preparation and staff development in first and second language methodology.

In spite of the non-provision by government of local languages textbooks or teachers' guides and other materials the college authority has made a positive move. It has encouraged and motivated tutors in their efforts to produce local language materials to train their students. The tutors also give pre-service instruction in mother-tongue pedagogy in an attempt to help transform bilingual instruction in Ghana's public schools.

TRANSFORMATION OF BILINGUAL TEACHER TRAINING: THE WOSEC EFFORT

The IEQ2 team that visited WOSEC in the district of KAPA accomplished their preliminary investigation through interviews and inspection of available materials. The Principal, Vice Principal, Heads of Department of English, Mathematics, Ghanaian Languages, Social Studies, Science and Education as well as six final year students were interviewed. The interview was aimed at finding their attitudes toward the school language policy and how the college is preparing prospective teachers to help implement it.

The investigation revealed that the Principal, Vice-Principal and all the heads of departments are aware of the existence of the language policy and can state it correctly. The staff of the college, especially the principal spoke favourably of the policy and advocated for its implementation countrywide. When asked whether he thought the policy as it stands is good and must be pursued, he responded "I love it." The principal himself is an Ewe and laments his children's inability to speak, read and write Ewe due to their being brought up in a non-Ewe speaking environment (they only speak Twi and English).

He went further to say, "students in this college are being trained to teach in the Ghanaian Language; in fact Ghanaian Language is now a compulsory subject for all students in the College." The college has adopted a policy whereby every student learns Twi not only as a subject but also to use it as a medium of instruction. The students write internal examinations in the Ghanaian Language they have studied. The Principal emphasised that every teacher going out of his college whether from the northern or southern part of the country should be able to read and write Twi by the time she/he leaves college.

It was discovered from the discussion with the Principal and the tutors that students were not only trained in the use of Twi as MOI but that an attempt has been made to introduce Ewe, another Ghanaian Language, for teaching and learning. The Principal made it clear that the second year

students (then out teaching) were the batch that officially began the intensive study and use of Twi and other Ghanaian languages, especially Ewe as both subjects and media of instruction. It came to light that once a non-Ghanaian, in fact, a Liberian refugee admitted to the college learnt to speak, read write and teach Twi to primary school pupils as a result of the schools' bilingual programme.

TRANSLATION WORKSHOP FOR TUTORS

To pursue the above the college has organised a series of workshops for tutors which eventually has resulted in the translation of existing textbooks for Maths, Science and Environmental Studies into Twi and Ewe for training the students.

TRAINING IN PEDAGOGY

Both tutors and students of the college said that lessons are given in methods of teaching the Ghanaian Language as a subject as well as using it as MOI to teach other subjects. The tutors said that there were six periods of methodology a week for three terms during the second year and this was continued by the students.

According to the Principal this arrangement has gone on for the past two years and will be intensified in subsequent years in order to strengthen the bilingual teaching and learning programme that has been introduced. The students affirmed that they regularly engage in peer teaching by way of practising the methods they had learned in the teaching of Ghanaian Language and its use as MOI. The team also learned that before students are organised for peer teaching sessions tutors give demonstration lessons in nearby primary schools.

EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO THE WOSEC EFFORT

In addition to the textbooks in Mathematics, Science and Environmental studies that have been translated into Twi and Ewe by tutors of the college the German Technical Cooperation Programme (GTZ) is giving support to the scheme at the college. The GTZ through the Assistance To Teacher Education Project (ASTEP) contribute to WOSEC effort through the following:

- supply of textbooks in Ghanaian languages
- supply of supplementary readers in Ghanaian languages
- development of methodologies for teaching and writing textbooks in
 - a. environmental studies
 - b. Twi
 - c. Ewe

FOLLOW-UP VISIT FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

The IEQ2 team intends to visit WOSEC for a second time to conduct an indepth study of how prospective teachers are being prepared in the college to implement the language policy when they graduate. The team intends to find among others:

- a. the structure of the programme for preparing teachers of bilingual education in schools,
- b. the attitudes that students and tutors hold towards the use of Ghanaian language and English as media of instruction in the training college as well as in schools,
- c. the type of materials that are available for training teachers to be able to use local languages and English as media of instructions and as subjects,
- d. the methods that are being employed in preparing trainee teachers for implementing the language policy,
- e. the level of competence of tutors who prepare teacher trainees in language pedagogy,
- f. the medium in which the subject methodologies are taught,
- g. the medium in which peer teaching sessions are conducted,
- h. the medium in which peer teaching sessions are conducted.

Data will be gathered by means of classroom and out of classroom observation, indepth interviews of individuals, and focus group discussion. Existing relevant documents and materials will also be examined.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WOSEC EFFORT

The following gives a summary of the activities through which WOSEC attempts to transform bilingual teacher training.

- Positive attitudes of staff and students,
- Production of local language materials for training students,
- Pre-service instruction in mother-tongue pedagogy,
- Compulsory study of Twi as subject and as MOI,
- Introduction of a second Ghanaian language as an option,
- Internal examinations in the Ghanaian languages studied,
- Translation workshops for tutors,
- Peer teaching for students to practice skills,
- Demonstration lessons by tutors in nearby primary schools.

CONCLUSION

One belief about proper policy implementation is that 'if we do it right it will work'. But it must be noted that 'doing it right' with regards to the language policy for schools especially in Ghana requires, among other things, that all stakeholders must have the right attitude towards the policy. Also, those to implement the policy in schools need to be given the requisite training by competent mentors using the most appropriate methods and materials.

Among the four colleges visited WOSEC is the only one that seemed to have attempted to prepare its students towards the implementation of the language policy in the schools in a way. Exposing students to two Ghanaian languages to be able to read, write and teach them as subjects and MOI is certainly a positive step.

While this effort should be encouraged caution must however be sounded against a possible surface-scratching education in the second Ghanaian language. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a person totally unfamiliar with a language to learn to acquire sufficient fluency in it and also be competent enough to teach it both as subject and as MOI in just three years.

In as much as teachers need to acquire the skills of teaching local languages as subjects and as MOI, it will be advisable to confine their training to the study of languages that they are already familiar with. They must be given training in languages that are predominant in areas where they teach.

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